

City's Pioneer Broker Interred in Maplewood Cemetery

By Dr. S. Robert Powell

Thomas Gillespie, Carbondale's first financial broker and one of the founders of the First National Bank of Carbondale is buried in historic Maplewood Cemetery.

Born in Troqueer, Scotland in 1804, he came to Carbondale in 1833 and established a residence (later to become the McMullen residence) on North Church Street. He soon formed a partnership with Charles White and engaged in the mercantile business.

After a brief period this connection was dissolved and Gillespie, in partnership with Horatio S. Pierce, established the firm of Gillespie & Pierce, which was not only among the most popular and successful firms in the Pioneer City but also one of the most prosperous firms in Northern Pennsylvania.

About that firm, the editor of the *Carbondale Advance* noted at the time: "It seemed to comprise in an eminent degree the elements of sagacity, enterprise and caution."

So successful was that partnership that Gillespie and Pierce, having accumulated a considerable fortune, discontinued the mercantile business and, associating with James Stott, engaged in the business of Private Banking, with great success, under the name of Gillespie, Pierce & Co.

That private banking enterprise became, in November of 1864, the First National Bank of Carbondale, with H. S. Pierce, president; John S. Law, vice-president; James Stott, cashier. The Board of Directors of the new bank were H. S. Pierce, James Stott, Anthony Grady, Thomas Gillespie, James Clarkson, John S. Law, D. N. Lathrope, William W. Bronson, and Lewis Pughe.

In 1848, Thomas Gillespie, upon the Whig ticket, was elected one of the county Representatives in the Legislature. In 1850, Thomas Gillespie was one of seven citizens of the village of Carbondale who were appointed by William Ball, Esq., on behalf of the village of Carbondale, to procure, by subscription, funds adequate for the purpose of purchasing engines and hose to extinguish fires in Carbondale. The other members of that committee were James Archbald (soon to be elected Carbondale's first mayor), James Dickson, Judson Clark, Anthony Miles, Anthony Grady, and Henry Evans.

On March 21, 1851, immediately following the incorporation of the City of Carbondale on March 15 of that year, Thomas Gillespie was elected to serve on the

city's Select Council. The other members of that first Select Council were Joseph Benjamin, Peter Campbell, and Michael Flynn.

Thomas Gillespie was a pillar of Carbondale's First Presbyterian Church. He was one of the three original subscribers (also D. N. Lathrope and Rev. T. S. Ward), each of whom donated \$1,000 towards the construction of the new church building in 1865.

As a highly successful business man and the banker, Thomas Gillespie had the financial resources that made it possible for him to be generous to members of his extended family. He purchased and gave to his sister, Jeanette (Gillespie) Locke and her family, for example, the house at 35 River Street, which stood on the site where Lapera's Gas Station now stands. In that house, Margaret Gillespie Locke and James Russell, who were to become highly prominent citizens of Fell Township during the second half of the nineteenth century, were married on New Year's Day, 1851.

In August 1867, Thomas Gillespie's health began to fail and, accompanied by friends, he undertook a journey by railroad to Western New York in the hope of benefit from a change of air and scenery. That hope was not realized.

On October 26, 1867, Thomas Gillespie died. A numerous concourse of friends attended his funeral, at which an appropriate discourse was delivered at the Presbyterian Church by the Pastor, Rev. Oliver Crane.

The executors of his last will and testament were Thomas Dickson (who ultimately became the president of the Delaware and Hudson Canal Company), John S. Law, and Horatio S. Pierce.

In his will he left \$5,000 to the American Bible Society, in order that the word of God might be spread throughout Luzerne, Wayne, and Susquehanna Counties. He also left a small gift of James Clarkson, Esq., a very dear friend.

The remainder of his estate, \$300,000, he stipulated was to be divided among the families of his two surviving and one deceased brother, and two sisters, numbering in all about forty heirs, each of whom was to receive \$7,500.

(In 1867, someone who earned \$1.00 a day was said to be earning a decent wage. If someone had a yearly income of \$400 in 1867, for example, a personal bequest of \$7,500 would have been regarded by him or her as the equivalent of 18 years' income.)

Thomas Gillespie gave liberally of himself and his resources to his community, to his church, and to his extended family. Surely, many lives were affected, hopefully for the better, from the public spirited thoughtfulness and generosity of the man.

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